

Address by President of Cedia – CONAF Conference, Perugia, Italy, 5th to 7th May 2017

Dear Colleagues,

It is a great pleasure for me to attend your annual Congress here in Perugia. I would like to thank CONAF, your President Dr Andrea Sisti and your Council for inviting me.

Cedia as you know is the network for Agricultural Scientists and Agricultural Engineers in Europe; it is the umbrella body linking the Associations in the various countries. It does not have a paid staff; all work is done on a pro bono basis. The nominal fees help to cover out of pocket expenses, holding of meetings, hosting of the website, administration costs etc.

For me personally it is very interesting to visit individual Associations and to see first hand the excellent work which is being done on behalf of members. Conaf is one of the more dynamic associations in Cedia. The very high profile which you have given to the profession, particularly during EXPO is much appreciated. The pavilion – farm of the Future, The World Congress and the Charter for the Agronomist were among the key highlights. I wish Dr Sisti, World President, and his team well in preparation for the next World Congress which will be held in South America in two years time, in 2019.

The key work on behalf of members has to be done by national Associations, however through our network we can cooperate and share ideas and of course when issues arise which are of concern to our members, we can speak as one voice in the European Union. The network has proven very useful in the establishment of international consortia, in preparation of proposals, and in competing for various EU funding opportunities. Cedia was recently registered on the European Transparency Registrar and participated in the Consultative process in relation to the review of CAP. The results of this public consultation will be unveiled this week; in fact Commissioner Hogan has already stated they will arm him with the necessary policy positions to argue for the necessary finance to secure the future of the sector.

While there is diversity among our associations there is also much in common, and the Charter of the Agronomist which I have already mentioned is a good example, and a common denominator for our profession. In a recent joint conference held in Vienna, Cedia and ICA (Association of European Life Science Universities) , with whom we closely cooperate, focussed on this document when curriculum were discussed in relation to present professional profiles, “are University courses adequately meeting the requirements of the Professional in the field”. On the other hand most Southern European countries have an official Registration process for professional organisations to include the Agricultural Engineer, while Northern European Countries do not have such a registration system for Agricultural graduates. This can have implications for mobility of

professionals north – South, but not in the reverse direction. Professional registration has been discussed at EU level and is something which should be further examined within our network.

Our Associations I believe are not only providing individual members with support and excellent services, e.g. Job services; Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities; mock interviews for new graduates, mentoring for young professionals, study visits, and outings for retired members; the highly respected national conferences, hosted by our associations, influence policy decisions, and enhance the profile of our Profession.

A major task for Cedia is to enlarge our network and footprint, to include all EU countries, and neighbouring countries where possible. Currently we are examining ways by which EU funding might be available for such a task. This would initially involve establishment of a greater network, eventually leading to the creation of Associations as currently exist in the Cedia network in these new countries.

Before finishing I would like to make mention of CAP and some other ongoing developments. A well functioning, growing Agri - Food Sector, properly resourced is good for our profession.

As we are all aware CAP arrangements have changed substantially over the years. The recent removal of sugar and milk quotas was among the final acts in these adjustments. The sector and the farmer are now fully subjected to market forces. The report of the Agricultural Markets Task presented recommendations on farmers in the food supply chain, to include better market information – mandatory price reporting with more timely and standard data; possible legislation to curb certain practises (late payments and breach of contract) , better use of contracts and futures markets , risk management - support by transfer of funds from direct payments, clarification of the law as applied to producer cooperation; access to finance –agriculture perceived as a risk area requiring support of special financial instruments. The recommendations are currently being considered by the commission.

The task force's report concludes that the policy framework governing the supply chain can and should be further improved , the report calls for new rules at EU level to cover certain unfair trading practises, better regulation as well as more effective enforcement . Better management and operation of the food chain to allow the farmer to obtain a more equitable portion of returns would assist the commission in a difficult budgetary situation

A big issue is the EU budget for the next financial period. In addition to regular market forces, there has been the Russian embargo and now also Brexit to deal with. The latter will cause serious problems, for my country, Ireland, in particular, and will also leave a €10 billion to €12 billion hole in EU finances. I note that the Agricultural Commissioner has asked EU governments to cover the budget gap, while the budget chief has predicted cuts across the board. It is clear that without new resources there will have to be cuts. A reflection paper has argued for a radical redesign of CAP expenditure with a reduction in direct farm payments, noting that €41 billion of the €58 billion CAP budget goes to the single farm payment. In fact agriculture took cuts in four of the five scenarios presented in the reflection paper. A budget proposal is due in mid 2018 to cover the next 7 years budgetary cycle.

While Agriculture and food is a key priority area, new initiatives in security, defence and migration also have to be accommodated making for a difficult budgetary situation.

Thank you for your attention - you have an excellent conference agenda –I wish you well in your deliberations over the next few days.

Sean Gaule